Life, Death, and Awakening: As Seen in Reflections of Nature

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Abstract
My objective, in undertaking this three year MFA degree has been to create and produce metaphorical paintings which communicate my deepest feelings about my personal experiences of life, death, and nature using various types of landscapes as subject matter. My goal has been to explore many processes of painting, using a range of color palettes to suggest and inspire emotional responses from viewers that are similar to my own. Ultimately my intention has been to share feelings of empathy between myself and a viewer through the art I've produced. This thesis body of work chronicles my three year journey.

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Graduation Date
2018

Semester
Spring

Advisor
Poindexter, Carla

Degree
Master of Fine Arts (M.F.A.)

College
College of Arts and Humanities

Department
Visual Arts and Design

Degree Program
Emerging Media; Studio Art and the Computer

Format
application/pdf

Identifier
CFE0007072

URL
http://purl.fcla.edu/fcla/etd/CFE0007072

Language
English

Release Date
May 2018

Length of Campus-only Access
None

Access Status
Masters Thesis (Open Access)

STARS Citation
https://stars.library.ucf.edu/etd/5865
 Spiritual awakenings happen as a natural product of your Soul evolving, expanding, and maturing. Just as everything in life grows, so too does our connection with our Souls. If you’re highly sensitive to the suffering of others and are a deep thinker by nature, it is possible that you have gone through, or are currently going through, a Dark Night of the Soul. The Dark Night of the Soul is a period in life when we feel completely cut off from God or the Divine. This life is a cycle of birth and death. As such, going through the Dark Night is not a pretty or manicured experience – at its core, it’s raw, primal, and the most difficult experience known to humanity. Everything is stripped away from you. Life is no longer ignored – it is seen as magical, amazing and beautiful. You will see that death does not happen to life. But, rather death happens in life. Life transcends and includes death. Life also transcends and includes birth. You—in your essential-life-nature—transcend and include birth, death and rebirth. Spiritual practice leads you to a vibrant realization of that which is ever-present throughout the birth–death–rebirth cycle. When this occurs you relate to all the little and big deaths of your life in new ways. Whether that death is the loss of a relationship, a job, an ability or your body. You recognize the function of death and rest in the ever-presence that is your deeper nature. Isn’t every moment as amazing and radiant as a drop of dew—and, as fleeting? Yes, there’s a lot to do. Assuming that sickness was a reflection of her weak character, each cycle of physical illness deepened her feelings of shame. She fearfully fast-forwarded into the future—“I’ll never get well;” and easily felt swamped in depression—“This will never change.” Seeing Life As It Is. When asked to describe her spiritual practice, a Zen nun from fifteenth-century Japan responded, “I meet life with my whole body.” Awareness of sensations brings us fully into the present moment and allows us to directly see the nature of our experience. When we meet as pure sensation whatever arises, we see clearly how everything is constantly changing; how there is no self causing sensations to arise, no self that sensations happen to. They arise and pass on their own.